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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 006160

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR OES/OHA, OES/PCI, NEA/IPA AND NEA/RA
HHS FOR OGHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: TBIO EAGR PREL IS CY EG JO KPAL KWBG TU ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SUBJECT: ISRAEL SEEKING REGIONAL COORDINATION ON AVIAN
INFLUENZA

REF: TEL AVIV 05579 (NOTAL)

11. (SBU) Summary: The GOI is hoping to use an existing health grouping to pull together a meeting of health ministers to coordinate regional preparations on avian influenza. The Turkish Health Minister reportedly has agreed to host such a gathering. GOI officials hope that there can be some USG representation if such a meeting takes place. End summary.

12. (SBU) Executive Director of the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) Michael Silbermann called on Ambassador Jones October 20. Established in 1996, MECC is a partnership between the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Health Ministries of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Turkey. Silbermann reported that the GOI Minister of Health was hoping to use MECC's existing links with the health ministries of member countries to quickly convene a meeting of health ministers to discuss common strategies for dealing with avian influenza. Silbermann said that likely venues would be Cyprus or Turkey, and that the Turkish Health Minister had offered to host such a meeting.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the WHO will be holding a meeting on avian influenza in Geneva November 7-9, and suggested that regional ministers might meet on the margins of that meeting, making it easier for U.S. officials to attend. Silbermann noted that possibility, but also said that the GOI wanted to see an initial meeting of regional health ministers take place sooner. (Note: Jordanian and Israeli veterinary officials reportedly met October 20 to discuss avian flu preparations; Israeli and Palestinian officials may meet for the same purpose in the coming days. End note).

14. (SBU) Silbermann commented that a meeting of health ministers would be useful even if not all MECC member countries attend. He said he hoped that a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, such as the ESTH Officer, would be able to attend if the meeting takes place in Turkey.

15. (SBU) Comment: The GOI MOH is proposing to take advantage of MECC's existing network to help organize a regional strategy meeting on avian influenza. This would not be a "MECC meeting," but rather a meeting on avian influenza of health ministers from MECC member countries. We will report on developments as we receive updates from Silbermann and GOI officials. While it's not yet clear whether this initiative will result in several countries in the region getting together around avian influenza, the proposal appears worthy of our support. End comment.

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JONES